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**The Myth of Womanhood and the Politics of Otherness: A Feminist  
Critique of No Honor and Someone Like Her**



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**Abstract**

Gender is an inevitable part of our daily life that is not biological but rather socially and culturally constructed. Simone de Beauvoir states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, p.15, 1949). The current study aimed to examine the portrayal of the myth of womanhood and otherness in Pakistani fictional literature, with a focus on Khan's *No Honor* (2021) and *Someone Like Her* (2023). Beauvoir's theory of gender construction is used. The study has explored how the selected novels depict the secondary status of women and gendered expectations such as submissiveness, purity, subservience, and domesticity within a patriarchal society in the Pakistani context. A qualitative research method is adopted. Through a close reading of the texts, the research has analyzed how the constructed ideologies regarding the female gender, such as myths of womanhood and the concept of otherness, shape women's lives. It is found that Pakistani society is a patriarchal society where women are positioned as an inessential other and restricted to certain roles that deprive them of agency. Under the burden of these expectations, women live a marginalized and suppressed life. The analysis broadens the existing knowledge of the feminist critique of gender stereotypes in South Asian literature. Moreover, it demonstrates how Pakistani contemporary fiction reframes new perspectives on gender roles with time. This research asserts that Pakistani society is saturated with masculine privileges. In the future, scholars can extend this analysis to women's writing. A comparative analysis would reveal whether male and female authors view gender issues differently in their narratives.

**Keywords:** Myths of Womanhood, Otherness, Purity, Submissiveness, and Suppression

**Introduction**

The Myth of Womanhood refers to the ideal image of a woman, culturally created by a patriarchal society. Through the myth of womanhood, society confines women to immanence while men claim transcendence. The myth of womanhood is one of the key gendered issues that weakens and restricts the image of women. According to Beauvoir (1949), myths are challenging to define due to their complex and ambiguous nature. It stays in the human mind and shapes it accordingly, without appearing as a fixed reality. However, a 'True Woman' was designated as the symbolic keeper of morality and decency within the home, being regarded as innately superior to men in terms of women's virtues such as piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter, 1976). Beauvoir (1949) argues that women do not enter the world as completely defined, predetermined females; instead, they are shaped by and through a certain interpretation of men in a male-dominant society. Furthermore, she writes, "The earth is woman, holds deep in her the same obscure forces as the earth" (p. 115). This symbolic quote reflects the mythical view where women are viewed as part of nature rather than as individuals like men. A patriarchal society operationalizes myths as a tool, imposing laws and traditions to shape people's minds and internalize collective rules in each person. Moreover, through these myths, women have been tied down to roles that picture them as pure, passive, dependent, and subservient.

These myths reinforce a rigid gender hierarchy in which women are expected to conform to society's predetermined expectations. Thus, according to Mayeda & Vijaykumar (2016), a family that adheres to the socially constructed notions of femininity and masculinity within such systems, women's and girls' sexual purity serves as central to the family's reputation.

Whereas, "Otherness is the fundamental category of human thought" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 21). 'Otherness' as a cultural construct becomes a key concept for exploring the roots of femininity, lifestyle, and experiencing reality in different cultural and traditional contexts (Wałęciuk-Dejneka, 2018). "To posit the Other is to define Manichaeism" (Beauvoir, 1949, p. 83), which metaphorically means that men view themselves as good (essential and subject); however, they view women as evil (inessential and other). Furthermore, de Lauretis (1990) believed that if the existence of a man poses a first threat to the status of the Other, then it is not surprising that historically man has positioned himself as the Subject and led women to a secondary status. In addition, de Beauvoir argues that at the moment when man views himself as subject and claims freedom, the idea of the Other becomes mediatory (Beauvoir, 1949). It reflects the idea that women, being the other, function as a mediator of men's superiority and independence. Likewise, men's autonomy and power are shaped by the concept of otherness, because women become the opposite figure when men define themselves.

Pakistani society is one of the dominant patriarchal societies where the female gender has been under the burden of societal and cultural expectations that have resulted in their subjugation. The current study can significantly raise awareness about the influence of societal norms imposed on gender, the hardships faced by females due to the myth of womanhood that perpetuates the status of women as the other within a male-dominated society. Awais Khan has contributed to the examination of gendered issues, including honor killings and violence against women within Pakistani society (Amjad et al. 2025). In Khan's *No Honor* (2021), Abida is a sixteen-year-old girl living in a small Pakistani village. There are age-old rules to live by; A girl must protect her family's honor. Although Abida's spirit is defiant, she desires to live with the man she loves, which shapes her fate. On the other hand, in *Someone Like Her* (2023), the protagonist, Ayesha, strives for economic independence and equality and desires to make a home with the love of her life. When she resists the oppressive patriarchal norms for love, she becomes a victim of a brutal act of revenge. Khan's unique portrayal of female characters highlights how the myth of womanhood and the status of women as the 'other' shape women's lives in Pakistan. These novels are chosen due to their thematic relevance to the objectives, since they offer an in-depth exploration of gender-based violence and patriarchal restrictions within contemporary Pakistani society. Thus, the objectives of the current study are to examine and analyze the portrayal of otherness and myths of womanhood in *Someone Like Her* (2023) and *No Honor* (2021) through Beauvoir's theory.

### **Literature Review**

The state of womanhood is mythical. Beauvoir refers to 'the myth of Woman' to depict images of womanhood that are imposed upon and reinforce static beliefs and feminine essence (Kjellgren, 2023). In *Neverwhere*, Door manifests traditionally feminine characteristics as identified by Linda Brannon (2004) and Mary E. Kite (2001): weakness, dependence, beauty, fragility, and vulnerability (Kesküla, 2015).

She is represented as inferior to man, who is dependent on him. While in *American Gods*, Laura is initially presented as a beautiful, loving, and traditional wife, but after her funeral, she becomes a living dead person. Then, she is portrayed as traditionally feminine, possessing characteristics such as affection, kindness, and consideration for others (Kesküla, 2015). Here, Laura is portrayed as a true woman in a mythical state; she is completely shaped by the myths of womanhood stated by de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949). Furthermore, according to Kamkankaew & Meesubthong (2025), beauty marketing has traditionally promoted narrow and unrealistic beauty standards that discourage women's self-confidence. These campaigns emphasize the ideals that exclude a wide range of appearances, which is why many women feel unrepresented. According to de Lauretis (1990), the otherness is one of the important concepts in *The Second Sex* (1949). Starting from the Sartrean idea of original conflict, de Beauvoir argues that man has always considered himself as the essential, the Self, and makes woman the Other (McCall, 1979). Additionally, she asserts that men's biological advantage has historically given them the power to enforce their desire to dominate (McCall, 1979). Likewise, Fiona Vera Gray's (2014) doctoral thesis sheds light on men-initiated public space harassment. She developed a framework based on de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy, which helps feminists reconnect women's agency and autonomy to the broader power relations. Finally, the study generated new evidence about how men's stranger intrusion in public spaces occurs and how women experience it. However, according to scholars like Agarwal (2008), the religious approach has almost universally naturalized gender differences by treating them as unchangeable. Women are treated as inferior to men both physically and mentally, which leads to the devaluation of women.

Furthermore, Pakistani women have been disadvantaged and discriminated against by men to a greater extent (Amnesty, 2002). According to Pande (2014), one of the major challenges in the South Asian context is the issue of Gender violence. Gender-based violence is a universal reality of the South Asian region, regardless of income, class, and culture. Even masculinity is defined at the women's expense, and a man's honor rests with women. Furthermore, Hadi (2019) concluded in his study on 'Patriarchy and Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan' that gender-based violence is the product of a patriarchal social system.' Additionally, the violent behavior of men against women in Pakistan, the suppressive traditional practices defended by labeling them as cultural and religious, aim at subjugating women (Amnesty, 2002). Moreover, most women in Pakistan who suffer from domestic physical violence remain silent, and very few report to any official body (Andersson et al, 2009). Hence, from the beginning of Pakistani English literature to contemporary writings, the issue of gender has always remained a key concern (Mehmood et al., 2021).

The selected texts, *No Honor* (2021) and *Someone Like Her* (2023), are the latest novels by the emerging Pakistani author Awais Khan. Khan (2023) did a comparative analysis of Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006) and Khan's *No Honor* (2021) to examine women's trade and prostitution using Kathleen Barry's concepts on the close ties between trafficking and prostitution. It is concluded that sexism and masculinized privileges are deeply rooted in patriarchal societies, and gendered misogyny is the hidden force at work to perpetuate the bleak social realities of trafficking and prostitution in patriarchal societies in Nepal and Pakistan. Furthermore, Amjad and Idris (2025) have examined the presence of female heterotopias in *No Honor* (2021) by drawing upon Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia (1967). The findings

reveal that such heterotopias reflect patriarchal dominance as well as the ability to take challenging actions against patriarchy. In *No Honor* (2021), the female heterotopias are portrayed as extremely paradoxical, such as both sites of confinement and protection zones, through representing women in a severely patriarchal world. Recently, Hassan et al. (2025) textually analyzed *No Honor* (2021) to investigate the reasons behind honor killings in Pakistan. The study shows that honor killing is rooted in several social practices, especially in the honor of women. Moreover, this brutal act perpetrates physical, psychological, and sexual impacts on women. However, Shah and Nawab (2024) have examined *Someone Like Her* (2023) from a psychoanalytic feminist perspective. The study uncovers themes such as male chauvinism, gender-based violence, and societal stereotypes. Male chauvinism is described as a superiority complex that transgresses a woman's dignity and equality and subjugates her both physically and psychologically. It is based on the notion that men are regarded as the superior gender to women. Based on the literature review and available data, there is a lack of scholarly feminist engagement with Pakistani fiction, regardless of its direct dealing with themes of gender, violence, and patriarchal control. Moreover, a clear scarcity of academic gender-based literary studies exists in contemporary Pakistani male authors, whose perspectives offer crucial and in-depth insights into how patriarchy and social restrictions are represented in literature. To fill this unexplored gap, the study aims to examine the representation of otherness and myths of womanhood in South Asian literature, more precisely in the Pakistani sociocultural context. Thus, de Beauvoir's (1949) Theory of gender construction becomes a suitable lens for the study.

### **Methodology**

The interpretivist paradigm underpins the current study, enabling a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural meanings within the selected texts. This is a text-based qualitative study. It involves analyzing characters, scenes, dialogues, and plot shaped by gender norms. Moreover, for the study of literature, the primary methodology is close reading as it relies upon careful observation, the sustained, and thorough reading of a text (Jockers 2013). This study employs close reading as an analytical approach, rather than as a complete model, to focus on specific details, such as otherness and myths of womanhood. Thus, close reading in this study is not neutral, but rather guided by de Beauvoir's theory. The study is theoretically grounded in de Beauvoir's theory of gender construction, proposed in her philosophical work *The Second Sex* (1949). The theory is a masterclass in analysis in which de Beauvoir examines how the structures of contemporary social norms and cultural practices consistently demote women. Additionally, Beauvoir exposes the implicit assumptions that underpin male domination (Dini, 2017). The theory addresses the concept of otherness, the myth of womanhood, and women's resistance. However, this study considers the myth of womanhood and otherness. According to de Beauvoir (1949), "Humanity is male and defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.... He is the Subject, he is absolute - she is the other" (p.29). It uncovers that women are systematically marginalized and men are autonomous, as measured through the prism of heterosexual relationships. Yet still rely on them for their desires, to perpetuate their social status, and for reproduction. Likewise, she came up with the idea that "no group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the other opposite

itself” (p. 21), demonstrating that ‘One’ could not be the one without marking another as secondary or Other. This is a hierarchical process where the other serves as a tool for the continuity of the One. Thus, “Other is as original as consciousness itself” (p. 21). Besides, while describing the myth of womanhood, she argues that “They live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work, economic interests, and social conditions to certain men—fathers or husbands, more closely than to other women” (p.22). She believes that through these myths, women have been tied down to repetitive roles such as devoted wife, domesticity, and dependence on men. Additionally, women are seen as both objects of sexual pleasure and symbols of temptation and femme fatales. This designation of a woman creates a myth that narrows down her role to objectification and sexuality.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

#### **No Honor (2023)**

##### **Myth of Womanhood**

Girls like you get thrown into the river if they’re lucky. Burned alive if they’re not. ‘Oh, she’s one of the lucky ones,’ Aslam said. ‘Fortunately for her, Pir Sahab doesn’t like fire’ (Khan, 2021, p. 1). This excerpt demonstrates the dehumanization of women who transgress the myths of womanhood created by a male-dominant society, specifically related to virginity. Beauvoir believes that the state of womanhood is mythical and closely tied to the ‘eternal feminine’. This imposed state narrows down the role of women to conventional gendered roles, including purity and obedience, motherhood, virginity, beauty, submissiveness, and domestic roles. It reveals that a woman’s virtue is solely based on her purity. In the context, Aslam and Pir use the myth of virginity and purity as a tool for imposing traditional laws. The paradoxical imagery of ‘thrown into the river and burned alive’ highlights the moral corruption of patriarchy, restoring honor while justifying violence. Moreover, her purification through water or destruction by fire is used to erase her existence. Hence, Khan has fearlessly depicted the rigidity of patriarchy, using myths of womanhood as a weapon against women's existentialism.

How could you, Shabnam?’ she whispered. ‘I begged you to run away.’ One glance at her son, and she changed gear. ‘How could you?’ she said, louder this time. ‘Your father must be turning in his grave (Khan, 2021, p. 2). These lines highlight that women are valued as protectors of men’s honor, but are subjected to violence when they deviate from the mythical ideal. Virginity and purity are among the mythical ideals of patriarchy. In this scene, Shabnam is devalued even by her mother due to her impurity. The shift in tone of Shabnam’s mother from maternal sympathy to enforcer of patriarchal authority underscores the internalization of gendered norms. This transformation sheds light on the social reality of how women’s lives are affected by the male gaze. Khan criticizes women being the gatekeepers of patriarchal society. Moreover, the statement ‘your father must be turning in his grave’ signifies ancestral disappointment, simultaneously demonstrating that even the dead father’s honor is prioritized over the living daughter. Collectively, it emphasizes the idea that a woman’s worth lies in her purity and chastity. Additionally, the myth of purity is used as a tool for confining and subjugating women.

“Not that I ever notice any females, but I have heard... your daughter has turned out beautiful and dutiful.” (Khan, 2021, p. 23) Khan critiques how patriarchal societies normalize narrow ideals such as the objectification of women and the dutifulness that

deny their individuality and subjectivity. In such societies, women's worth is not judged by their abilities and intellect but rather by how perfectly they fit into the imposed social ideals. Furthermore, 'Not that I ever notice any females' is an irony that underscores women being unworthy of serious attention, but still perpetuates judging them based on traditional gendered roles. While the alliteration 'beautiful and dutiful' links physical attractiveness with subservience, suggesting that a 'perfect' woman is both beautiful and fit enough to social expectations.

"You've got quite a tongue on you. It will cost you enough if you're not careful. In our society, girls are not meant to speak their minds. Surely your mother must have told you." She shrugged. 'None of my business. At least my daughter is married now. That's a relief' (Khan, 2021, p. 34). The statement exposes how the patriarchy silences women, that a woman cannot speak her mind because it disrupts the social structures. Moreover, it highlights the mythical ideal that a woman's worth lies in her conformity rather than individuality. That's why, for peaceful survival, she must submit to the social norms quietly. If she transgresses these imposed rules, she will fall victim to a male-dominant society. Rukhsana serves as a gate of patriarchal society. The phrase 'in our society' highlights the impact of societal norms on Rukhsana and how she imposes them on Abida by warning her about the repercussions of resisting these norms. Additionally, 'the relief after daughter's marriage' illustrates another limitation of women, that is, staying unmarried for so long is not considered good. Secondly, in such cruel societies, after a daughter's marriage, parents are relieved from social judgments.

"You have ruined the name of your family, girl, and the reputation of this village. 'These crimes don't go unpunished. Remember that'" (Khan, 2021, p. 36). The pir considers Abida a criminal for transgressing the imposed state of womanhood that views women's purity as the foundation of morality. She has lost her virginity before marriage, which threatened the norms of the patriarchal society she lives in. Moreover, in a male-dominated society, a woman is viewed as a reflection of a man's honor. The phrases 'family name' and 'village reputation' show how women are burdened with collective honor. This dialogue reflects the myth that considers women as bearers of honor, especially in South Asia. Furthermore, it emphasizes the idea that women are judged not by their actual selves but by how obedient and disobedient they are in these socially constructed roles. When they resist, their fate is decided by the male member of the family or society. Abida is addressed as someone who has violated her expected role and is blamed only for collective shame.

### **Otherness**

It was when they snatched the baby from her. She realized how serious the situation had become. She could smell the damp fabric from where she lay on the floor- You should have thought of that before you brought this filth into your home- Pray that your brother is merciful. A lot of brothers aren't (Khan, 2021, p. 1). These lines reveal the secondary status of women within a male-dominant society. According to de Beauvoir, historically, society has positioned men as the absolute, while women are given the status of the other or secondary. This positioning turns womanhood into a socially and culturally imposed destiny rather than a neutral identity. 'Snatching the baby' symbolizes the ultimate loss of a woman's agency that is motherhood, as patriarchal society has reduced her role to motherhood, simultaneously depriving her of it. The realization of a serious situation shows the social pressure and cruelty that

treat women as objects to be controlled. Moreover, 'lying on the floor' serves as a hyperbole that intensifies her (Shabnam) devaluation. While 'damp fabric' metaphorically refers to the impurity of Shabnam's body. However, the midwife's statement exposes another woman as the sustainer of male-defined virtues. Furthermore, 'praying' shows submission and helplessness, that her fate does not lie in her will but in the mercy of her brother. Thus, she has been represented as dependent, helpless, and an object to be controlled, capturing a marginalized and powerless status of women in patriarchal society.

What a fool she had been to think her brother would support her. As the knocking became urgent pounding, she turned to her brother again (Khan, 2021, pp. 4-5). Khan highlights the hypocrisy of patriarchal society that views men as the guardians of women's honor, at the same time subjugating them. Shabnam's regret and realization reflect the internalization of the embedded false belief in male protection. Moreover, turning again to her brother shows her helpless dependence on him for protection. This portrayal illustrates the extended boundary of a woman's subjugation; she is not even free in her home. Her own brother is using her as an object to restore his family's honor. Thus, Shabnam is not autonomous but rather dependent on her brother and the villagers' decision for her survival.

She needs to understand what she's done, and I need to restore my family's honor. Hear, hear, the crowd cheered. "There's a man who knows what he has to do" (Khan, 2021, p. 6). This dialogue by Aslam demonstrates his priority of honor over his sister. Shabnam gives birth to a child out of wedlock. Her fiancée raped her. When the man suggested they walk down the river, no one batted an eyelid. Her mother also never warned her about men and their ways. When she gave birth to a child out of wedlock, Aslam handed her over to the villagers to restore his family's honor. Here, a brother sacrifices his sister and her child to uphold his honor, a virtue society expects of a man. However, the gathered crowd cheered to applaud Aslam for his redemption and to decide the fate of Shabnam. The crowd signifies a collective celebration of male dominance. The excerpt 'to restore my honor' highlights her existence completely in relation to men's authority. In such societies, honor and dignity are solely associated with a man, and a woman is considered a reflection of a man's honor and dignity. The man will still restore his honor for social approval, even if he is at fault and the woman is innocent. When Shabnam challenges the social norms regarding gender and gives birth to her child before marriage, her existence is considered a threat to a man's honor and dignity.

"There is no greater punishment than to be born a woman in this place" (Khan, 2021, p. 20). Furthermore, being a woman within a patriarchal society is the worst punishment one could ever have. Khan has portrayed the existence of a woman as a predetermined limitation, characterized by oppression and marginalization due to the patriarchal system that constructs women as the Other. In addition, the existence of women is viewed as being punished, which demonstrates that being a woman means inequality, oppression, and denial of freedom. Thus, the statement highlights how Otherness serves as an existential and social penalty for women in male-dominant societies.

Farida was weeping now. "Go and do it, save your other children. Let them have a chance at life. She is lost to us" (Khan, 2021, p. 72). Here, Farida serves as a gatekeeper of the patriarchal society; her daughter's life holds less value for her. Her emotional yet direct tone perpetuates patriarchal norms that compel her husband to



sacrifice Abida, making her the other within her own family. The concept of Otherness sparks here as the villagers are gathered to punish her for her wrong deed, but Kalim, who is equally at fault, is free, and no one batted an eyelid at him. Abida is not considered autonomous but rather defined in opposition to Kalim. According to Beauvoir (1949), the Other is often sacrificed, silenced, or marginalized to maintain the stability of male dominance. This scene illustrates the violence of Otherness, not only physical but emotional and existential, which is the ultimate denial of subjectivity.

### **Someone Like Her (2023)**

#### **Myth of Womanhood**

“Her father had frowned when he first visited the offices of the charity. ‘Girls in our family do not work, beta,’ he had murmured, surveying the place with distaste. ‘What people will say – that Safdar Khan Khakwani is now incapable of looking after his daughter?’” (Khan, 2023, p. 7). Khan has portrayed the patriarchal norms that prohibit women’s agency within the family and society. Being a man, Ayesha’s father frowns at her lofty idea of economic independence. His frown signifies the internalization of social expectations. Her father expects the same from her, that a good woman remains in the private sphere and is dedicated to household chores. Moreover, Safdar’s statement, “Girls in our family do not work, beta” (Khan, 2023, p. 7), reflects that traditional gender roles and societal norms shape his mindset. In addition, it encapsulates de Beauvoir’s concept of the myths of womanhood that restrict women to domesticity and define their virtue based on their dependence. In contrast, women’s public visibility is considered a threat to conventions rather than a form of empowerment. That’s why he is more about social judgments than her daughter’s well-being. Thus, this skilled portrayal exemplifies de Beauvoir’s myth of womanhood that uncovers how patriarchy mythologizes femininity to submissiveness and domesticity, which reinforces male authority.

‘May God bless you, Bibi. May you marry the richest man in Multan’ (Khan, 2023, p. 8). This dialogue by Bashir, a security guard at the charity office, reinforces the mythical ideal of patriarchy that a woman’s happiness is solely associated with marriage and the financial status of her husband. Rather than her own economic independence and ambitions. Moreover, the blessing reveals that within a male-dominant society, a female’s worth lies in a secure and prosperous marriage, maintaining gender inequality. However, the reference to “the richest man in Multan” connects femininity to patriarchal values and uncovers how women’s financial dependency is being romanticized as a cultural ideal in Multan.

“It’s because we married our daughter to her cousin, thinking that if she stayed in the family—in the same house—she would be safe. The mother wept into her hands. ‘Haye, what will become of her now? Her entire life is ruined. Nobody in Multan will ever marry her again. Look at her face, Ji’” (Khan, 2023, p. 9). This statement is a tragic irony as the space where the father felt her daughter’s safety turned out to be a site of domestic assault. Simultaneously, it underscores the prevailing patriarchal notion that restricts women to domestic and familial boundaries with the illusion of protection and honor. In addition, it exposes the rigid reality that a woman is more secure under a man’s control, and her true identity is in relation to a man. It shows the deprivation of women’s individual identity within a male-dominant society. ‘In the family and house’ symbolize the entrapment of women’s freedom. This domestic boundary limits

women's transcendence and reinforces the immanence that confines them. On the other hand, her mother's cry shed light on another key myth of womanhood, objectification based on beauty. Here, Rabia's face symbolizes the identity of a woman, while its mutilation symbolizes the loss of womanhood. Undoubtedly, in such societies, woman is expected to be nurturing to fulfill men's desires. The hyperbole 'her entire life is ruined' exaggerates the interrelation between physical beauty and virtue. Thus, this portrayal criticizes the glorification of domesticity and the equation of women's confinement to illusory protection.

"At least, he doesn't beat her. Your grandfather beat me to within an inch of my life and expected me to prepare dinner for him the next minute. And I did. Like clockwork" (Khan, 2023, p. 16) This dialogue by Ayesha's grandmother captures the myth of the ideal wife, who endures suffering quietly and serves despite abuse, according to a male-dominant society. These lines normalize the violence identified by de Beauvoir in myths of womanhood that endurance is the natural component of femininity, glorifying the submissiveness of women. Cooking after beating is the imposed state of womanhood that turns a woman into a mechanical being. Here, 'like clockwork' is a metaphor used for a repetitive cycle. Moreover, 'preparing dinner in the next minute' illustrates how patriarchy masks female duties in the name of marriage obligations. The grandmother measures improvement not in terms of liberation or freedom, but in lessened brutality; at least Ishrat is not beaten by Safdar, her husband. Thus, it reflects the decline of women's subjectivity within Pakistani society.

You're a girl who knows how to keep a man happy. Girls like you ought to be savoured.' And he licked his lips" (Khan, 2023, p. 96). According to de Beauvoir, women are viewed as both a tool of sexual pleasure and symbols of temptation and femme fatale. In this dialogue, Raza reduces a woman's value to her ability to please a man and satisfy his desires. By the metaphor 'ought to be savoured,' she is compared with food, which dehumanizes her and treats her as an object of pleasure. While the description 'he licked his lips' portrays the animalistic image of lust, it intensifies the dehumanization by viewing her as prey for men's sexual desires. Thus, these lines highlight how womanhood confines women to being mere tools of satisfaction rather than human beings.

### **Otherness**

'I can still provide for the family, Begum,' Safdar Khan had said, puffing up his chest, an indignant expression on his face. 'Never let it be said that a Multani man cannot look after his family' (Khan, 2023, p. 7). Like myths of womanhood, the notion of the other is represented in the first chapter of the book to reveal the depth of internalized gendered norms in South Asia. According to de Beauvoir (1949), men view women as passive, inessential/ marginalized, mere objects, inferior, and dependent. In this scene, Safdar asserts himself as the provider for the family, showing his masculine pride, which is a product of societal expectations. This position reinforces men's dominance and women's subordination. Additionally, Begum's dependence on Safdar reflects man's self-definition and subjectivity. The act of 'puffing up his chest' symbolizes the assertion of men's superiority and performativity. Furthermore, 'never let it be said' illustrates the fear of social judgments over man's failure. Likewise, de Beauvoir has highlighted that women being the other serves as a mediator of men's superiority, independence, and self-definition. Thus, Safdar's subjectivity led his

Begum to the status of the other. Khan has exposed the socio-cultural pressure on men to be the provider and dominant, as male failure is considered a collective shame in a patriarchal society.

'Nowhere is safe for our girls in this country. We never dreamed that my nephew would turn out to be a monster. He carved up her face with a knife' (Khan, 2023, p. 7). The lines expose the deeply embedded patriarchal idea that is the systematic vulnerability of women, not only in society but also in kinship. In such societies, a woman's body becomes a site of assaults for men. 'Nowhere is safe' serves as a hyperbole that illustrates the inescapable trap of patriarchy against women's existential freedom. Khan's lamentable portrayal uncovers the extended boundary of female confinement even within the family, where the nephew (as husband of Rabia) subjugates her through physical abuse. The metaphorical noun 'monster' shows the moral corruption of a man due to the practice of superiority over women. Furthermore, the 'face' symbolizes female identity. Hence, Khan has skillfully revealed how men's dominance ruins women's identity and autonomy.

'She must have done something,' the police officer remarked, a smirk on his face. 'Men don't just cut their wives' faces like this for no reason. I'd like to hear the other side of the story' (Khan, 2023, p. 9). In this scene, the hypocrisy of patriarchy has been revealed; it not only subjugates women but also naturalizes their oppression. Wife, being the other, is blamed for the violence she endures, while the husband is at fault, justified with a lame excuse that she must have done something. The officer's statement underscores victim-blaming, depriving women of existential selfhood. These lines engage with de Beauvoir's otherness as they portray women as inferior and the other by justifying patriarchal violence. The wife is mutilated but still blamed for the male aggression.

"I guess she has to since I'm the only son. Very important, you know. 'I'm an only child too'" (Khan, 2023, p. 39). "I didn't mean I was an only child. I've got sisters, but I'm the only son, and that's what really matters, doesn't it? In a society like ours?" (Khan, 2023, p. 40). In these lines, Raza emphasizes the significance of being the only son. According to him, his mother has to do anything for him; this shows that even a mother is passive and subservient to her son in a patriarchal society. In a society like this, men are always dominant in every position. Secondly, when Ayesha objects that I'm an only child too, Raza emphasized, "I've sisters, but I'm the only son, and that's what matters" (Khan, 2023, p. 40), which means there is a considerable difference between being the only son and daughter due to the position they hold in society. Moreover, 'in a society like ours?' explicitly refers to a male-dominated society where a man is considered the standard and dominant figure, while a woman is considered submissive and less important.

'Before marriage, a girl bends to the will of her family. After marriage, she bends to the will of her husband. There is no in-between. Not for us women (Khan, 2023, p. 57). Furthermore, flashback hits Ayesha, recalling her grandmother's words about the ideal woman in patriarchal society. This narrative exposes women as the other; both before and after marriage, women have been defined in relation to men rather than as autonomous individuals. Beauvoir believes that women have never been recognized as independent human beings, but as relatives who are bound by obedience to men throughout their lives. Symbolically, the cycle from father to husband shows the perpetuity of patriarchal control, while denying women's existence for themselves. The repetition of 'bends' demonstrates the suppression of female agency, suggesting

that women's agency is distorted under male authority. The definitive phrase 'there is no in-between' shows that females do not have choice or freedom, highlighting the rigidity of gender roles in restraining women's lives.

### **Conclusion**

By analyzing the texts of contemporary Pakistani fiction, particularly Khan's *No Honor* (2021) and *Someone Like Her* (2023), through de Beauvoir's theoretical framework, it is found that for social approval, women are expected to shape their personalities and desires according to the imposed state of womanhood. It is witnessed through the discussion that Pakistani society is one of the dominant patriarchal societies. The analysis underscores that social pressure on women affects their lives, forcing them to live according to social expectations, or the head of the family (who is always a man). The myths of womanhood and otherness are vividly portrayed in the texts. The state of womanhood and otherness not only objectifies women but also normalizes female marginalization. Thus, they live deprived and dependent lives. However, it contributes to the feminist discourse of gender issues. Simultaneously, it raises awareness about the influence of societal norms on gendered roles within the Pakistani sociocultural context due to its alignment with feminist literary criticism. It reveals the relevance of Beauvoir's theory in Pakistani literary studies. In addition, it bridges Western feminist theory with South Asian literature. In the future, scholars can extend this analysis to women's writing. A comparative analysis would reveal whether male and female authors view gender issues differently in their narratives. Moreover, while this article focuses on gendered issues, future studies could explore how intersectionality subjugates women.

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